

## I see our friend George

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"Living Lore" Series

Francis Donovan, Thomaston, Connecticut

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Mr. MacCurrie is keeping lonely vigil at the fire house windows today, and he tells me he hasn't "been out of the place since ten o'clock this morning."

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"I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have this place to come to," he says. "If I hang around the house old MacPherson comes over and we get into an argument. When he argues with you, he quotes Burns and Scott and all the Scotch poets, and I can't stand that kind of stuff. I pick up me hat and get out.

"The old fool is always getting into some kind of trouble. He's got water in his cellar up there, and he swears the neighbors are responsible for it. He wants to sue some of them. He goes up town here the other day and he sees this lawyer up in the block and the lad tells him he's got a case there, but he'll have to hand out fifty dollars for a retainin' fee.

"I told him that lawyer would have his shirt, but there's no talkin' to him. He's awful set in his ways, the old man is. And high tempered. I see him have an argument with that fella next door one time. The lad was out in the garden and old Mac got the idea he was diggin' on his land, and he went over to him, and pulled the fork right out of his hands.

"He come in the house after it was over, and he says to me: 'By God, Andrew, I felt just as vigorous as a young man.' The old deevil. Truth was he got the fella by surprise and that's how he grabbed the fork away so quick. But he's never satisfied unless 2 he's arguin' with somebody."

I inquire as to the whereabouts of other members of the group and Mr. MacCurrie raises an expressive eyebrow. "They buried old Ed the other day, and Armstrong's in the hospital; Bill Sichler moved away. Henry, he'll probably be showin' up pretty soon.

"But he ain't been feelin' any too good the past few weeks. He's been complainin' a lot, haven't you noticed? He was down Monday night for the time --they had the 57th anniversary celebration--and he was eatin' sandwiches and sour pickles for all he was worth. Howard, over next door, gave him hell. Says he 'No wonder you don't feel good lately, you eatin' stuff like that'.

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"They had quite a time Monday night. All the honorary members were invited. Doc Wight showed movies and they had beer and sandwiches. I had a couple of glasses of beer, but I didn't stay long. I like to get to bed early, and get up early.

"There's old man Beardslee," says Mr. MacCurrie, indicating an old gentleman passing by who is probably not a day older than himself, but much less vigorous. "It's a wonder he don't get killed, the way he shuffles along. He goes down to band rehearsal every Monday night, come hell or high water. They can't keep him away. He belonged to the band for so many years I suppose it's second nature. Just likes to sit there and listen to the rest of them play.

"Did you hear anything about them bringin' in some more workers from out west with that new line they're puttin' in here?

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What do you know about that! Bringin' in more new workers and they haven't got enough to do for the people in town.

"And what are they goin' to do with the old Marine shop and the old Movement shop now that they've got the stuff moved out? I heard once they'd want to rent 'em. But who'd rent em, the way times are?

"Well, if they want to rent 'em they're takin' a different line from the old companies. You know, years ago there wasn't nobody could rent land for a factory in this town. They kept 'em out. Didn't want 'em. That was so they wouldn't have labor trouble. They said one time the Coe brass interests wanted to come in here. Nobody'd sell 'em a factory site. If they'd got in here, this town would have been as big as Torrington.

Mr. MacCurrie takes a generous pinch of snuff.

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"They had their good points, though," he says. "That pension system they put in was pretty good while it lasted. I was in on that, you know. But of course no pension system could last, the way they were running it. Couldn't stand the strain. The ordinary laborers was gettin' fourteen and fifteen dollars a week pension, and some of them that had been foremen was gettin' twenty dollars and higher.

"I don't know just how they work these pensions now, but they don't get much. Way I heard it, they give a man two weeks pay for every year he worked there. It don't last more than a couple of years.

"It's a funny thing, they got everything in this country they 4 need. Enough for everybody. Why can't they work out some system where everybody has enough? Look at the goddom money that's been wasted.

"Look at the money that was poured out in the gutter, you might say, tryin' to enforce prohibition. Nobody will ever know how much. The money spent on enforcement, and the money lost in license fees and the money taken in and never accounted for by bootleggers. Mon, it's a cryin' shame.

"And the dom fool things they did. Arrestin' a man for 'reputation! I wonder was that ever fought out in the courts. Seems to me it was illegal.

"I remember one time I was over to the hotel havin' a nip and a bunch of cops came in to raid it. They was all Thomaston fellas, Charley What'sis-Name and Dan Sanger and some more. They searched the place from top to bottom, couldn't find a thing. They was all ready to go out, and Dan says 'Wait a minute.' He walked in the back room and when he came out he had a half pint. Now by God, you can't tell me he didn't have that half pint when he went in there.

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"That was the way of it," sighs Mr. MacCurrie. "It was a horrible mistake. Accomplished nothin' and did a lot of harm.

"Sometimes I think they run things better in the old country. There was a lot of poverty and discontent, but things went along a bit steadier. Over there, now, they're 'way ahead of us when it comes to socialized medicine.

"I got a sister-in-law over there a doctor. My brother was a 5 school teacher, and when the war broke out, they made him a second lieutenant and sent him across. He wasn't over there but fifteen days when he got blowed to pieces. Afterwards the government took care of his wife. She wanted to study medicine, so they paid for it. Then she went over to Africa and worked among the niggers over there, and now she's back in the old country doin' social work.

"Me and my older sisters, we had to get out and scratch, when we were youngsters. Never got much chance for education. But the younger ones got more of a chance, they was well educated.

"I had a chance to go to New Zealand, when I was a young fella, but I came here instead, because my sisters was here. But I had an uncle went to New Zealand and did good over there. He came back to Scotland for a visit, just before I came over here, and he wanted me to go back and live with him. I often wonder would I been any better off.

"You never can tell. But it don't do no good to think about it now."